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RIGHTS OF THE CHILD

Written statement submitted by Fraternité Notre Dame, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1296 (XLIV).

[24 February 1998]

GE.98-10860 (E)

Protection of Children

1. On this 50th Anniversary of the Declaration of Human Rights, everyone must remember his duty to protect whomever is weaker, and not to oppress what is fragile.

2. By his very definition, a child is a weak being deprived of any defence, gifted with a delicate sensitivity and shaping his mind after the images and shapes of his environment. If he receives joy and love, he will bear within himself the seeds of peace and harmony which will give him, when an adult, his balance in life and in his thoughts and which will contribute to establish an equitable and stable society.

3. A child is a mirror to our societies. Our ambitions, our avowed or concealed desires, our never-quenched pursuit of progress are reflected in his innocent eyes and make them bright or dull, in an indelible fashion. Our societies bring him life or death, hope or distress. Our world of adults is responsible for his future, which will be after the image that we have given him, either his being will open up or be debased.

4. A child has a right of his own, which is the one to grow and develop in a safe and sound environment, bringing him a minimum to live on and a moral education sufficient to make of him a full-sized being.

5. Now, how can we hear without great fear such words as "sales of children", or "prostitution and pornography involving children" ... Odious words which should never be uttered or even imagined in a human mind.

At the end of this millennium, the suffering of these ill-treated children raises up from everywhere and is a shame for humanity. It sheds light on the terrible debasement of which certain individuals are capable, and underlines the silence of witnesses, which makes the moral and physical disarray of these victims turn as red as blood, and they are forever marked into their innermost beings.

6. Fraternité Notre Dame takes a special care of childhood, for it considers the latter as being the harvest of tomorrow. Fraternité Notre Dame's members serve especially those who are most weak, abandoned newborn babies, and young orphans.

7. Unfortunately, Fraternité Notre Dame has noticed that orphans in less developed countries, street children and wandering children are the ones who are the first prey for these unavowable practices. Thus, their lot is aggravated with an additional burden of injustice.

8. Therefore, as preventive measures, it is essential to develop education centres accessible to all, houses to welcome parentless children, and facilities that strengthen family units, especially in developing countries.

Fighting poverty and children's poverty is a high priority. Our childhood in this twentieth century is being abandoned, scoffed at and betrayed. We think that measures at a worldwide level are required to put an end to such practices.

9. Fraternité Notre Dame is filled with zeal to succour first age, which is also the age of innocence. If every child is being guarded by a barrier of affection and decency, the tide of these shameful practices will slow down by itself. A child exposed to begging in the street is a child exposed to selling his life, wasting his health and discarding his education, and finally, he will tramp his honour and dignity underfoot. Restoring a meaning to a bruised child's life is giving him back the right to speak, the right to be listened to, the right to apprenticeship and progress, work and social integration.

10. Fraternité Notre Dame makes sure to offer every destitute child who is entrusted to its care, a gain in self-confidence, an education, a bit of hope for the future ... and a smile for tomorrow's society.